

# NEWS RELEASE

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## **Jury Convicts Texas Man of Possessing 282 Kilos Cocaine Estimated Street Value More than \$28 Million**

Urbana, Illinois -- Rodger A. Heaton, United States Attorney for the Central District of Illinois, announced that a federal jury deliberated two hours on January 31, 2007, before finding Jasper Vargas, age 41, of Mission, Texas, guilty of possessing more than five kilograms of cocaine with intent to distribute. Chief U.S. District Judge Michael P. McCuskey ordered that Vargas continue to be detained in the custody of the U.S. Marshals Service pending sentencing, scheduled on May 2, 2007, at 11:00 a.m., in Urbana, Illinois.

Evidence presented during the three days of trial established that shortly before noon, on November 20, 2004, Vargas was driving a semi-tractor refrigerated trailer containing produce northbound on Interstate 57 in Iroquois county when he was stopped for speeding by the Illinois State Police. During a subsequent search of the trailer, law enforcement agents found approximately 282 kilograms of cocaine, in 157 bundles, in a secret compartment in the trailer's refrigeration unit. Wholesale value of the cocaine is estimated at \$5.5 million, with a street value of more than \$28 million.

At trial, a witness for the United States testified that Vargas admitted he was transporting the cocaine to Chicago for a Mexican drug cartel; other witnesses testified that they had previously observed Vargas transport large loads of contraband using a refrigerated tractor-trailer and "cover" loads of produce.

Vargas has three prior felony drug convictions. At sentencing, he faces a mandatory term of life imprisonment without release, and a fine up to \$8 million.

The charge was the result of an investigation by Immigration and Customs Enforcement, Illinois State Police, Drug Enforcement Administration, and the Texas Department of Public Safety. The case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Eugene Miller in the Urbana Division of the U.S. Attorney's Office.

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